

# Guide for Transitioning to Telehealth Delivery of Mental Health: Addressing Barriers during the COVID-19 Outbreak

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As a response to the current COVID-19 Outbreak, many clinics are transitioning to telehealth delivery of services as a way to maintain clinical services during the crisis. Telehealth is a readily available approach that has demonstrated promise in the appropriate delivery of evidence-based treatments. In this guide, you will find tips and considerations for working with patients using this modality.

## Questions to Ask Patients:

1. Are you willing to be seen via telehealth?
2. Do you have access to a smart phone, tablet, or computer/laptop with a webcam?
3. Do you have access to WiFi or a cellular hotspot?
4. Is there a private place in your home where you can have sessions?
5. [For child patients] Is there an adult or caregiver that will be available in the home for safety purposes during sessions?

## Suggested Equipment for Patients:

1. Smart Phone, Tablet, or Computer/Laptop
2. Charging Cable
3. Headset with a Microphone

## Suggested Equipment for Clinician:

1. Computer/Laptop
2. Charging Cable
3. Headset with a Microphone
4. Examples of secure platforms: VidyConnect, Zoom (HIPAA compliant version), VSee, Doxy.me

## Considerations for Patients

- Ensure private location in the home.
- Create safety protocol for sessions.
- Establish boundaries for sessions.

It is important to have discussions with patients surrounding expectations, boundaries, and safety protocols related to telehealth services. Having these discussions prior to starting services and throughout sessions can ensure that services are delivered in an appropriate, ethical, and efficient manner.

## Reminders for Patients and Home-Based Telehealth Services:

- Ensure sessions take place in a private location
  - Ideally a room with a door or a part of the home away from other members of family
  - If patient must use a bedroom for session, they should be sitting at a desk or table, not on their bed or laying down.
- Develop a safety plan prior to initiating services via telehealth
  - For adult patients: confirm telephone number and address
    - If an adult patient is unsafe, a clinician will contact 911 or local emergency number. The emergency services will assess for safety and transport to nearest Emergency Department, if necessary.
  - For child patients: confirm telephone number and address; ensure caregiver will be at home for the duration of session for emergency purposes.
    - If a child patient is unsafe, a clinician will contact the caregiver in the home and ask them to come into the room. If child remains a danger to themselves, the clinician will contact 911 or local emergency number. The emergency services will assess for safety and transport to nearest Emergency Department, if necessary.

## Considerations for Clinicians:

- Ensure sessions take place in a private location
  - Example: Home Office, Room with a Door
  - Clinicians should NOT see patients from their bed.
- Consider bringing home a noise reduction/white noise machine to position outside the door.
- Pay attention to what can be seen in camera view
  - Ensure a neutral background appears behind you on camera.
  - To create this space, consider using an adjustable screen or a divider behind your chair.
- Remove audible distractions from room
  - Example: Turn off television, mute phones, move pets to a different part of the house
- Dress appropriately for session
  - Example: Business Casual Attire (should still be professional even though services are taking place in your home).
- Use headphones with a microphone
  - This allows clinicians to have clear audio, as well as protecting privacy of patients.

